

## Kept Promises by MissSunFlower94

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**Summary:**

"We can go to the Snow Ball."

~

"You're gonna see him soon."

## Kept Promises

When Eleven joins Hopper for breakfast the man looks almost... angry.

Not angry, though. Eleven has seen him angry – at her, at others. It is very recognizable and this is not that. He looks unhappy, but then, he always looks some kind of unhappy. Even his smiles look unhappy. He had once asked her why she was angry with him when she had not been angry at all, and she was starting to see that some people's faces just had *looks* to them, whether they wanted those looks or not. Hopper's *look* is unhappy.

But he looks like he means it, this unhappy look. She's seen it before when he comes back late from work, or when she asks him a question he doesn't want to answer. It means something is not going the way he wants it to. She's sure there's a word for it, and wishes she knew it; it's something she feels often. It probably means he's not angry *with* her, but she's still on edge.

In the days since the closing of the Gate (twenty-five days – she doesn't mean to start counting them again, but it had become a habit), Hopper had been around more, trying to keep her company when she's brought back into hiding. He brings her books on stars, which neither of them really understand but that's kind of nice, in a way. There are even nights he let them go outside, not far, just to look up at the sky through the trees before going in and drinking cocoa.

It's nice, even if Eleven knows confinement will always weigh on her, and that eventually his life outside will take more of his attention again. She is trying to enjoy what she can. She only hopes that this current mood of his isn't signifying a beginning of the end.

It's at this point in her thinking over breakfast that she notices he has barely eaten, and that he keeps looking at her. Getting worried, she catches his eye. He doesn't look away, or pretend he wasn't caught. That's good. He doesn't say anything. That's less good.

"Did... Did something happen?" She asks at last. She feels like if it

were bad he'd tell her, but she isn't sure she believes that.

He holds the silence a moment longer before giving a sigh that's almost a growl. He shifts, grabbing something in his pocket, all the while muttering, "Yeah, you could say something happened." He sounds a little closer to angry, but in a tired way.

Hopper takes what he found in his pocket – a folded up paper – and passes it to her. "Found this under the front door this morning. It's for you."

She unfolds it once, to see it's an envelope. On the front, in big red-crayon handwriting is "El".

Eleven can't remember if she's seen his writing, to know it. But it doesn't matter. She still knows.

"Mike," she says, touching the writing. She's smiling, she knows she is, but she can't stop it.

"It's unsigned," Hopper says, bringing her back to where she is. "But I can't imagine who else would do this." Her heart is pounding away in her chest, but she tries to control her smile. She thinks she understands his mood now, and wonders how she didn't recognize it earlier; this is his *Mike-mood*. "You gonna open it?" He adds.

She looks at the envelope again, then back at him. "Did you?"

He sighs again, but says, "Yes." No explanation, no defense, just the truth. That's enough for her.

She opens the flap and pulls out another folded paper. This one is a pretty blue color, and unfolds twice before she can see what is on it.

There are white snowflake drawings all around the edges and scattered throughout the paper. The lettering is white, too, a little hard to read on the blue, but it's much neater than Mike's crayon. The words are just as big though, and easily she reads:

**SNOW BALL**  
**Saturday December 15**

## 6-8 PM

# Hawkins Middle School Gymnasium

“Gymnasium,” Hopper says, and Eleven realizes she has been reading the words aloud before getting stuck on that one. She’s heard it, just never read it. It doesn’t matter. She’s barely thinking of details in that moment. She’s thinking about Mike. She’s thinking about his smile and his big dark eyes and the way he values promises more than anyone she’s ever met. Of course he remembers, even so many hundreds of days later.

*We can go to the Snow Ball.*

*Promise?*

*Promise.*

She still isn’t sure she exactly understands what ‘a cheesy school dance’ is, but she remembers the promise and she remembers the kiss (she’s seen kisses on TV since, sees that there are people who are kissed often by their special person and envies them), and she decides it doesn’t matter whatever it is. She’d see Mike again. She reads the words again and her chest feels tight like it does when she’s going to cry. But in that moment she’s not unhappy. She’s not unhappy at all.

Hopper clears his throat and she looks up at last. At the look on his face, her chest feels even tighter and her smile disappears as she truly grasps why he is in this mood. He isn’t angry with her, or with Mike. This is a different angry, an angry she *does* feel often, an angry with the world, with its unfairness. Angry because they both know in that moment that there is no point in her asking. They know what he is going to say.

*I know that you miss him, alright? But it’s too dangerous.*

Except he doesn’t say it.

He doesn’t say anything again. He looks at her, and at the paper in her hands, and at the envelope with ‘El’ on it.

*You're gonna see him soon. And not just in that head of yours.*

He still doesn't say it.

*You're gonna see him in real life.*

Instead he says this: "I'm meeting with Owens next week. The guy from the lab, Owens?" She nods, remembering the injured man they passed when closing the Gate. He sighs, running a hand through his hair. "I'll- I'll talk to him, alright?"

Eleven blinks. Did she hear him correctly?

"He owes me one, and he's already gonna give me a clear timeframe for when you can leave. A real one. No more 'soon'." He notices that she looks more than a little lost; there is so much he has just given her to take in. He offers a small smile, shaking his head and continuing. "What I'm saying is, regardless, I'll see what I can pull. About getting you a night."

Eleven can feel tears welling up in her eyes. "You're letting me go?"

"It's not a promise," Hopper says quickly. "I can't guarantee anything. But I'll try, kid. I'll try. You... you deserve this. Now eat your breakfast before it's cold," he adds, before she can say anything.

Hastily, wiping at her tears she nods again and returns to her meal, but not before she manages a hoarse, "Thank you."

And when Hopper smiles back, Eleven thinks there might not even be any unhappiness to it.